

BARBADOS 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws provide for freedom of religion, including the freedom to change one's religion, and it prohibits discrimination based on religious belief. By law, the government does not require religious groups to register and grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and provide religious instruction.

No legislative action occurred during the year regarding the government's 2020 announcement legalizing same-sex civil unions or on holding a referendum on same-sex marriage, but some religious groups continued to oppose the legislation. COVID-19 health restrictions were in place until late September, and most religious leaders commented these restrictions continued to negatively affect their organizations. Media outlets reported backlash from some religious groups to a survey administered by the Ministry of Education and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) that asked 10- to 12-year-old children about sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Religious leaders called the questions "inappropriate" and termed the survey a "possible abuse" of children. According to politicians, the rejection of the survey created a political climate that limited opportunities to discuss the legalization of same-sex civil unions or marriage during the year. In June, members of the Rastafarian community expressed concern that they were not represented on the newly formed 10-member Constitutional Reform Commission (CRC) appointed to oversee the development and enactment of a new constitution.

Religious leaders representing the Anglican, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, among others, acknowledged the growing social acceptance of same-sex relationships but said they were committed to following their beliefs and were opposed to the idea of their churches sanctioning same-sex relationships.

During the year, U.S. embassy officials engaged government officials, including from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on respect for religious diversity and tolerance and discussed opportunities to jointly promote these values. On January 27, the Ambassador and other members of the embassy community

participated in a candle lighting ceremony to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In November, representatives of the embassy engaged with members of the Muslim and Rastafarian communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 302,700 (midyear 2022). According to the most recent census in 2010, approximately 76 percent of the population is Christian, including Anglicans (23.9 percent of the total population), Pentecostals (19.5 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (5.9 percent), Methodists (4.2 percent), Roman Catholics (3.8 percent), Wesleyans (3.4 percent), Church of the Nazarenes (3.2 percent), and the Church of God (2.4 percent). Religious groups with 2 percent or less of the population each include Baptists, Moravians, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other religious groups, together constituting less than 3 percent of the population, include Muslims, Jews, Rastafarians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is. Approximately 21 percent of respondents do not identify a religious affiliation. According to the leader of the Jewish community, many Jews are part-time residents or periodic visitors to the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The country became a republic in 2021. The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom of individuals to change their religion, and the prohibition of discrimination based on creed. A law criminalizing "blasphemous libel" is not enforced.

The government requires religious groups to register only to obtain duty-free import privileges and tax benefits. A religious group must file the relevant customs and tax forms with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office, along with a resolution passed by a majority of its board of trustees expressly authorizing the application, plus the group's related statutory declaration.

The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and provide religious instruction. The government provides subsidies or

financial assistance to some of these schools to help cover the cost of students who could not find space in a public school. The public school curriculum includes religious “values education” as part of the historic association of schools with Christian missionaries, who founded many of the schools. At the primary school level, the focus of religious instruction is nondenominational Christianity. At the secondary school level, all major religions are included. The constitution protects students from mandatory religious instruction, ceremony, or observance without personal consent or, if younger than 21, consent of parents or guardians. Homeschooled children must be registered with the Ministry of Education.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

No further legislative action occurred during the year regarding the government’s 2020 announcement to legalize same-sex civil unions or on holding a referendum on same-sex marriage, but some religious groups, including Anglican, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventists, continued to oppose the legislation.

Until late September, government COVID-19 regulations continued to limit public gatherings, including attendance at in-person church services based on a church’s physical capacity. Most religious leaders continued to say that COVID-19 public health restrictions on gatherings, although applied equally in the country, adversely affected their organization’s finances and hampered membership growth prospects. Several religious organizations reported they had successfully implemented online services to offset the public gathering limits. Government officials continued to engage with religious leaders to support their public messaging to emphasize the importance of COVID-19 vaccinations.

In June, the cabinet approved and the attorney general appointed the 10-member CRC to advise the government on the formulation of the new constitution, with its recommendations due in 2023. The attorney general selected CRC members to reflect a wide cross-section of society, including religious diversity. He, however, did not select a member from the Rastafarian community to sit on the CRC. A Rastafarian spokesperson said the exclusion slighted the community, especially because Christians and Muslims were represented.

In March, according to media outlets, the chief education officer gave assurances to the small Rastafarian community that the government would review policies regarding the school dress code after media reports said parents of Rastafarian children were required to provide the school a letter from a Rastafari leader confirming the child's religion so they could be allowed to attend classes with dreadlocks. The National Rastafari Registry Secretariat and Trust (NRRST) protested the required letter on the basis that no members of other religions had to prove their faith. Additionally, the NRRST stated the "letter policy" displayed an ignorance of Rastafarianism, noting it is an individual tradition, without church leaders, and that only parents should decide and determine if their child is a Rastafarian.

Rastafarians continued to object to the law requiring vaccinations for school enrollment.

According to media reports, public support for religious organizations to sanction same-sex relationships declined in October when the Ministry of Education and the IDB administered a controversial survey to 700 10-12-year-old students. The survey contained questions of a psychosocial nature, including asking students if they drank alcohol without parents' approval, deliberately tried to hurt themselves, thought about suicide, thought about sex, and if they wished they were of the opposite sex. The questions regarding sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity led to a backlash against the government, with calls for the Minister of Education to resign. Religious leaders called the questions "inappropriate" and termed the survey a "possible abuse" of children. According to politicians, the rejection of the survey created a political climate that limited opportunities to discuss the legalization of same-sex civil unions or marriage during the year.

According to Muslim Association of Barbados representatives, their organization maintained a positive relationship with the government, and they expressed appreciation that the government changed the law in 2020 to allow Muslim women to wear head coverings when obtaining a national identity card or passport.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Religious leaders representing the Anglican, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, among others, acknowledged the growing social acceptance of same-sex relationships but said they were committed to following their beliefs and were opposed to the idea of their churches sanctioning same-sex relationships. Press reports described the public outcry over the government-IDB survey of 10- to 12-year-olds as a reflection of the societal taboo of discussing sex, homosexuality, and religion.

Representatives of the Muslim Association of Barbados reiterated that their relationships with other religious organizations were excellent.

The Anglican Church continued to provide space for a shelter for victims of abuse, regardless of religious affiliation or belief.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials met with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss respect for religious diversity and tolerance and how to further advance these values.

On January 27, the Ambassador and other members of the embassy community participated in a candle lighting ceremony to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Ambassador honored the memory of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust on the 77th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

In November, embassy officials met with members of the Muslim Association of Barbados to emphasize the U.S. government's commitment to promoting religious freedom for all, including minority religious groups.

The embassy promoted National Religious Freedom Day and extended greetings on Chinese Lunar New Year, Holi, Easter, and Ramadan via the embassy's official social media platforms.